

## The Social and Intellectual Origins of Anthony Benezet's Antislavery Radicalism

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Anthony Benezet was born to Huguenot parents on January 31, 1713, in St. Quentin Picardy, France. Under the regime of Henry IV the persecuted Protestant Huguenots experienced a period of semi-religious freedom which lasted from the Edict of Nantes, promulgated in 1598, until 1685. During the rule of Louis XIV extreme measures were taken to limit and eventually to eradicate Protestantism. When the Edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685, a century of semi-religious toleration came to an end. Huguenot pastors who refused to convert to Catholicism were singled out for persecution. If they and their flock fled or were forced into exile their property was immediately taken and the remaining family members victimized. The Huguenots who remained were required to join the Catholic Church. The Benezet family, which had substantial wealth and had lived in the region for centuries, decided to stay in France. Anthony was baptized in St. Catherine's Church, February 1, 1713, by the parish priest. Those who converted and remained in France were required to attend classes in Catholicism. Some women were even sent to be educated in convents.

However, all Huguenots did not comply with the dictates of Louis XIV and some actively resisted. Those who did were severely persecuted. Yet while Jean Étienne Benezet, Anthony's father, had the young boy baptized, the elder Benezet was a member of a French Protestant group called the "Inspirés de la Vaunage." These men were descendants of and inspired by the Camisards who had resisted the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in the Cevennes Mountains of southern France. The "Inspirés" however, unlike the original Camisards, who organized guerrilla warfare against the French regime, did not believe in the use of force. In fact the "Inspirés" were often referred to as "Congeries Quakers" because of their belief in nonviolent resistance to authoritarian rule which was quite similar to the English Quakers.

In a letter to a friend, Benezet wrote, "one of my uncles was hung by these intolerants, my aunt was put in a convent, two of my cousins died at the galleys, and my fugitive father was hung in effigy for explaining the gospel differently from the priests and the family was ruined by the confiscation of his property."<sup>1</sup> These events and the desire to provide both physical and economic security for his family led Jean Étienne Benezet to sneak them out of France and into Holland in 1715. After a twelve-night journey covering some 170 miles, the family arrived in Rotterdam, where many other Huguenots had fled. To get out of the country the elder Benezet had to bribe the French

sentries along the border. However, after only a few months in Holland, he became dissatisfied with his economic prospects and joined a growing exodus of Huguenots who left for England. Though moderately successful there, the elderly Benezet seemed unhappy with his economic status, English Protestant society, and the prospects of finding a trade or business for his sons. In 1731 he moved the family for the final time. This time it was to Philadelphia, the "city of brotherly love."

Jean Benezet and his wife Judith had thirteen children, but at least half died before they reached their first birthday. Although it has been asserted that the Benezet family had joined the Quakers while in England, records have not been found to prove that. What is known is that the first religious associates the Benezet family had in Philadelphia were the Quakers. The elder Benezet, after years of hard work as an importer of dry goods, finally achieved some economic success. It is believed that his remaining sons worked with him in his business, but Anthony, the eldest, had no desire to be among the "buyers and sellers" in Philadelphia. While no portraits were ever made of Anthony, it is known that he had a small frame unsuitable for the hard apprenticeships that many young endured. Benezet was also known to have had a "frail constitution" most of his life and during adulthood he made detailed studies of medical journals to find ways to improve his health. At some point he also became a vegetarian, like his late friend, Benjamin Lay, and against the wishes of his friend of later years, Dr. Benjamin Rush.

Given young Anthony's background, the persecution of family members, and the subjugation of the Huguenots in an increasingly intolerant French society, along with his observations of the treatment of immigrants in Holland and England, it is not difficult to see why Benezet would make the central mission of his life the defense of another persecuted minority, the enslaved Africans. His belief in the rights of Blacks may have been passed on from his father, an associate of George Whitefield, a leader of the Great Awakening of the 1730s. The elder Benezet had contributed to Whitefield's unsuccessful venture to start the Nazareth training school for Blacks on 5,000 acres near the Delaware River.

Although the elder Benezet had associated himself with the Quakers in London and later in Philadelphia, he had also expressed an interest in the Moravians. In 1743 "when a Moravian congregation was organized in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Benezet's father and his three sisters, Susanna, Judith and Marianne joined them."<sup>2</sup> His sister, Susanna, had one year earlier married John Pyraleus, one of the first Moravian missionaries sent to America. The exact year of Anthony's admittance to the Society of Friends is not known, but he was "well recommended to the Quakers of Philadelphia by divers Friends."<sup>3</sup> In 1735, he was naturalized as a British citizen. On May 13, 1736, he married Joyce Marriot, whose grandfather was the prominent physician Griffith Owen.

a Quaker minister. Joyce Benezet also became a Quaker minister. Joyce and Anthony had two children, both whom died in infancy. Perhaps because of his weak frame and dislike for trade and commerce Anthony sought what he thought would be a less strenuous vocation. But more than likely it was his love of books, his mastery of several languages, his love of children, and his passion for the truth, that led him to become a teacher and lifelong educator. Around this time he also "did work as a proofreader for a printer."<sup>4</sup> In 1742, "he was solicited to take charge of a school in Philadelphia, founded by and chartered from William Penn."<sup>5</sup> He stayed at the Penn School for twelve years and in 1755 he "established a school on his own account for the instruction of girls, and soon found himself intrusted with the education of the daughters of the most affluent and respectable inhabitants of the city."<sup>6</sup>

In 1750, Benezet also began to teach young Black people primarily in his own home. Summing up his intentions he wrote "having observed the many disadvantages these afflicted people labor under in point of education and otherwise, a tender care has taken place to promote their instruction in school learning, and also their religious and temporal welfare, in order to qualify them for becoming reputable members of society."<sup>7</sup>

Although the Quakers had not officially taken a position against slavery during the mid-eighteenth century, they were the only institutional organization of any type where men and women spoke out against white people's injustices to their Black fellow human beings. Several factors linked Benezet's Quaker religious beliefs with his early sentiments for the enslaved Africans. The first "was that all people were equal in the sight of God."<sup>8</sup> This belief, however, did not mean that Quakers thought Blacks were socially equal, or that all forms of involuntary servitude was wrong. Second, Benezet used the Quaker doctrine of nonviolence, effectively citing "travellers' journals" to show how Africans were violently captured, starved during the middle passage, and beaten while on the master's plantation. The third doctrine was "that Friends should avoid ostentation and sloth in their daily lives" as it "made both masters and children lazy."<sup>9</sup> Because Benezet believed that greed, luxury, vanity, and the desire for maximum profits corrupted human beings, he saw wealth as the root of the evils of eighteenth-century society. His observations led him to link Europeans, especially the British, to what he saw as "the love of wealth" brought about by the burgeoning Atlantic slave trade.

Linking his Quaker beliefs with his growing hatred of slavery, Benezet began a career as a writer and activist with the goal of freeing the enslaved Africans and finding ways to educate them. In one of his first antislavery tracts, written in 1766 and entitled *A Caution and a Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies*, he wrote: "Thus an unsatiable desire for gain hath become the principal and moving cause of the most abominable and dreadful scene that was perhaps ever acted upon the face of the earth."<sup>10</sup> To those who tried to

separate slave owners, some of whom may have inherited their slaves, and slave traders, who were in the business for profit, Benezet asserted that their distinction was "a plea founded more in words than supported by truth."<sup>11</sup> He believed that anyone "who is not blinded by the Desire of Gain" should recognize that "the right by which these Men hold the Negro in Bondage is no other than what is derived by those who stole them."<sup>12</sup> Again linking the trade to the worldwide drive for profits, he wrote in a letter to his close friend Samuel Fothergill that "it is frequent to see even Friends, toiling year after year, enriching themselves, and thus gathering fuel for our children's vanity and corruption."<sup>13</sup>

Time and again, Benezet invoked the doctrine of equality, along with his hatred of unfettered commerce for the single-minded pursuit of profit, in his crusade. To be sure, he was never as dramatic as Benjamin Lay (1677-1759), the author of *All-Slave Keepers, That Keep The Innocent in Bondage, Apostates* (1737). Lay was born in Colchester, England but had viewed slavery and the slave trade first-hand when he moved to Barbados. Later he settled in the Philadelphia area. Lay became known for his radical departure from the quiet Quaker tradition. Once he kidnapped a Quaker child to show white parents and their peers the grief felt by Africans when they or their children were stolen from their African homeland. At the 1738 Yearly Meeting, the hunch-backed Lay came dressed in a military uniform with a sword hidden under his coat and a Bible which had been fitted with a bladder-like container filled with blood-colored juice. During the debate, Lay rose from his seat and exclaimed, "Oh all you Negro masters who are contentedly holding your fellow creatures in a state of slavery, . . . you might as well throw off the plain coat as I do. It would be as justifiable in the sight of the Almighty . . . if you should thrust a sword through their hearts as I do this book!"<sup>14</sup> The blood-colored pokeberry juice splattered all over the gathering. Lay, who lived outside of Philadelphia in a cave, was shunned by his fellow Quakers because of his beliefs and actions and was seldom seen after the bladder-splattering event. Unlike his fellow Quakers, Benezet adopted some of Lay's ideas if not his methods. Both men refused to eat any food or wear any clothing which was thought to be produced by the labor of enslaved Africans. Lay in fact raised "vegetables for food and flax for clothing" near his cave which was six miles outside of Philadelphia.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, when Benezet later became a vegetarian it was in part because he did not believe that any life, including that of an animal, should be taken in order to feed another living being. Benezet went so far as to admonish school children who killed rats and mice, and he could often be seen feeding these creatures in his yard.

Lay was publicly disowned by the Quakers at the Yearly Meeting of 1738. But as Roger Bruns had written "20 years later, the 1758 meeting decided to exclude slaveholders from positions of responsibility within the sect."<sup>16</sup> Benezet



had seen Quakers like Lay scorned and disowned for their anti-slavery activities, but not for the owning and trading in slaves. He decided that a less confrontational approach was needed to convert the Society, as a whole, to the antislavery cause. Finally in 1772, after over a half-century of debate and thirty-four years after the Lay outburst, the Philadelphia Friends decided to require all their members to disavow slavery and manumit their slaves. At first, it seemed that the vote at the 1772 yearly meeting would go against the abolitionists. Then Benezet, who had been silent throughout the meeting, solemnly rose. Weeping profusely, he walked to the front of the meeting and quietly spoke by memory from the *Book of Psalms*. "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God."<sup>17</sup> His message was that the children of Africa were also God-fearing and God-loving people, worthy of His grace. Benezet returned to his seat just as quietly as he had arisen, but his message carried the day. The Quakers were by now not significantly in the slave trade and became the first whites to sound a united voice against slavery in the Americas. Many Quakers had, over the years since the first debates, manumitted their slaves. Other slave-owning Quakers had seen their slaves die in captivity and did not replace them. But by now others simply had no use for the institution. There had also been a large influx of German and other European immigrants to the area who provided cheap sources of labor. It is hard to see which motive prevailed. Some of the Quakers came to anti-slavery conclusions for purely economic reasons, others for more moral ones. Still others who never owned slaves but never stood up against the institution wished simply that the contentious matter would go away.

The growing influence of the determined and saintly leader John Woolman (1720-1772), who unlike Benezet traveled extensively in the mid-Atlantic region and in the South and saw the daily effects of slavery there, also helped to mold Quaker attitudes toward slavery. Woolman, a tailor by trade, became the most respected of the Quaker leaders. His was a voice that was heard outside of Quaker communities and he had strong contacts with influential leaders like Benjamin Franklin. Woolman had never proclaimed the equality of Blacks, as Benezet later did, but he did have a powerful following. His *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes*, first published in 1754, had a profound effect. While many Quakers had carefully distinguished between the slave trade and slavery itself, Woolman helped them see the sinfulness of both. For him there could no longer be a justification of slavery on the basis of helping the poor African. In 1762, *Consideration on Keeping Negroes: Part Second* was published. Coming two years after Benezet's first antislavery pamphlet, Woolman adopted Benezet's method of using extensive quotations from the journals of European travelers.

Benezet's deep sensibilities about the mental capabilities of the Africans exceeded those of other white people of his time. Because as a teacher he had

day-to-day contact with Blacks, unlike his English antislavery brethren Thomas Clarkson, he came to believe that the enslaved Africans were full and equal human beings. In this regard, Benezet differed not only from Woolman but from George Whitefield as well. Whitefield had spoken against the slave trade but owned slaves himself and willed them to the English aristocrat, Selina, dowager countess of Huntington. She planned to use them as servants at a school she had recently founded for orphans in Savannah, Georgia. Whitefield had earlier refused to take a stand against slavery itself and declared "whether it be lawful for Christians to buy slaves, and thereby encourage the nations from whence they are brought to be a perpetual war with each other, I shall not take upon me to determine."<sup>18</sup> Yet this leader of the Great Awakening proclaimed in 1740, "Blacks are just as much, and no more conceived and born in sin, as white men are. Both if born and bred up here, I am persuaded, are naturally capable of the same [religious] improvement."<sup>19</sup> It was only after Benezet wrote the Countess that she changed her plans to use the slaves.

Benezet developed a different approach to involuntary servitude than his contemporaries. He refused to accept the contradiction of many of his peers like Benjamin Franklin and Patrick Henry, who theoretically opposed slavery yet owned slaves. Henry, upon receiving Benezet's *Some Historical Account of Guinea* from the leading antislave trade advocate in Virginia, Robert Pleasants, wrote a letter of thanks exclaiming:

I take this Opportunity to acknowledge ye receipt of Anthony Benezet's book against the slave trade. I thank you for it. Would anyone believe that I am a Master of Slaves of my own purchase? I am drawn along by ye general Inconvenience of living without them; I will nor, I cannot justify it.<sup>20</sup>

Yet Henry refused to release his slaves. Perhaps what most separated Benezet from his contemporaries in Philadelphia was his actual association with Blacks in other than a slave-owning capacity. Because of this association and his appreciation for the lives and well-being of the enslaved Africans, Benezet stood apart from most men and women of his time.

Benezet established and taught at the Friends School for Black People, later called the African Free School. It opened in a Quaker building on June 28, 1770, some twenty years after Benezet had begun teaching Blacks in his own home.<sup>21</sup> Among his many students were Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, who both became leading ministers in the city. Allen founded the first African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, and Jones, the African Church, where he became the first Black priest among the Protestant Episcopalians. Another student was James Forten, who served aboard a Philadelphia privateer, the *Royal Louis*, during the Revolutionary War and who became acquainted with Granville Sharpe while spending a year in England. Together they later founded

the Free African Society. All three were free Blacks who subsequently petitioned Congress to repeal the Fugitive Slave Trade Act of 1793. Forten led the opposition to the American Colonization Society and was joined in this struggle by Benezet, who also opposed sending Blacks (many who had never been in Africa) to uncertain lives in parts of Africa that they did not know. Forten later helped found the Black Convention movement, which united Black antislavery activists from many states in their fight against slavery before the Civil War.

A particularly moving account of Benezet's feeling for the oppressed Blacks came in his repeated effort to move his reading audience by pointing to the sorrow of an enslaved man lamenting for his family after he had been stolen away from Africa. In *Short Observations on Slavery*, Benezet, in seeking to show that Blacks too were human, described a "Negro, residing near PHILADELPHIA," who was "dejected and frequently dropping tears, when fondling his masters' children" as he reminisced about his wife and children "in his own country" before being "violently seized and carried away, by persons who lay in wait to catch men." In describing his thoughts about his students in the epilogue of his *Short Observations*, Benezet, in a rare instance, reverts to the third person:

The writer of the foregoing introductory observations, i.e. A. Benezet teacher in a school established by the private subscription, in Philadelphia, for the instruction of the Black children and others of that people, has for years, had the opportunity of knowing the temper and genius of the Africans; particularly of those under his tuition, who had many, of different ages; and he can say with truth and sincerity declare, that he had found amongst a like number of Whites and he is bold to assert, that the notion entertained by some, that the Blacks are inferior to the Whites in their capacities, is a vulgar prejudice, founded on the Pride of Ignorance of their lordly masters who have kept their slaves at such a distance, as to be unable to form a right judgment of them.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, the writings of Benezet were praised by Olaudah Equiano, one of the first enslaved Africans to write about his life and own opposition to slavery. In the *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vasa, the African* (1789) he praised Benezet's *Some Historical Account of Guinea*. Since he was kidnapped at such a young age, Equiano also relied on Benezet's printed text to describe his native land and simply wrote: "See Benezet's 'Account of Africa' throughout."<sup>23</sup> The kidnapping scene described by Equiano is remarkably similar to one Benezet had written about years earlier. Another former enslaved African, Ottobah Cugoana, wrote in his narrative, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evils of Slavery*, published in 1787 that "the worthy and judicious author of *Historical Account of Guinea*, and others, have given some

very striking estimations of the exceeding evil occasioned by that wicked diabolical traffic of the African slave trade."<sup>24</sup>

Benezet combined his recollections and observations with long quotations from intellectuals such as the French Baron de Montesquieu and the Scottish philosopher Frances Hutcheson. Beginning with *A Short Account* and continuing through most of his other tracts, Benezet started a tradition followed by other anti-slavery crusaders of mixing large passages from Enlightenment thinkers with those from slave trade journals and travelers' accounts. This combination served several purposes and would appeal to those who viewed the questions of liberty and natural rights as key to the freedom of men and women in America. Benezet's purpose was to convince his readers that these same rights applied to the Blacks be they in Africa, the West Indies or British colonial America. Benezet, his British allies John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, and others freely borrowed passages from each other's writings to further their antislavery work. Of Benezet's effect on him, John Wesley wrote in his journal of February 12, 1772:

I read a very different book, published by an honest Quaker, on that execrable sum of all villainies, commonly called the Slave trade. I read of nothing like it in the heathen world, whether ancient or modern; and it infinitely exceeds, in every instance of barbarity, whatever Christian slaves suffer in Mahometan countries.<sup>25</sup>

Complete sections of John Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery* were lifted with the author's approval and joy from Benezet's pamphlets.<sup>26</sup> Borrowing ideas and words from like-minded writers was common in one eighteenth century.

In Montesquieu's (1689-1755) *Esprit des Lois*, Benezet found a powerful intellectual voice against slavery. He often quoted Montesquieu's observation that:

that state of slavery is in its own nature bad. It is neither useful to the master nor to the slave; not to the slave because he can do nothing through a motive of virtue; nor to the master, because by having an unlimited authority over his slaves he insensibly accustoms himself to the want of all moral values, and thence becomes fierce, hasty, severe, choleric, voluptuous and cruel.<sup>27</sup>

Benezet also was deeply influenced by the works of Francis Hutcheson (1694-1747), the famed University of Glasgow professor. He often quoted from Hutcheson's *System of Moral Philosophy* (1755) where Hutcheson wrote that slaves who were sold into faraway countries had never forfeited their freedom. Hutcheson argued for liberty, happiness, and benevolence. He proclaimed that "no endowments, natural or acquired, can give a perfect right to assume power over others, without their consent."<sup>28</sup>



In most cases, Benezet agreed with Hutcheson's ideas, but differed with him on the right of the enslaved to physically resist that oppression. Hutcheson believed that "the subjects must have a right of resistance, as the trust is broken, beside the manifest plea of necessity."<sup>29</sup> As a Quaker, who strictly believed in nonviolence, Benezet was fearful that the Blacks would rise up unless they were educated and unless whites came to condemn slavery.

In sum, Benezet employed the ideals of the Enlightenment and later of the American Revolution to further his cause. The appeal to the Revolution was problematic because many Quakers retained their allegiance to England and some were jailed for failing to support the rebels. Others favored independence but believed that war violated their religious principles and refused to fight. They were America's earliest conscientious objectors. And quite a few "Fighting Quakers," in fact, joined the Revolutionary Army. Benezet tried to appeal to principles all those Quakers would understand. He wrote in *Notes on the Slave Trade* that

... it cannot be, that either war or contract, can give any such a property in another as he has in a sheep and oxen. Much less is it possible, that any child of man, should ever be born a slave. Liberty is the right of every human creature, as soon as he breathes the vital air. And no man can deprive him of that right, which he derives from the right of nature.<sup>30</sup>

Benezet was also fond of citing the Scottish jurist George Wallace, whose major published work was *A System of the Principles of the Law of Scotland* (1760). In *Systems*, Wallace wrote, "all that inequality, which is to be found among the human race, is derived from political and arbitrary institutions alone," that "all inequality all dependence, all servility, all superiority, all subjugation, all pre-eminence, which is not necessary to the welfare of Society, is unnatural; and that if it could, it ought to be destroyed."<sup>31</sup>

Benezet agreed with many of Wallace's concepts of equality but had special regard for his early antimaterialist sentiments. Benezet used Wallace's formulation to assert that there could never be any legal title for one human being to possess another. Thus sales and transactions for human flesh were "ipso jure void." Benezet quoted Wallace frequently, as in his *Short Account of Africa*:

men and their liberty are not in commerce; they are not either saleable or purchaseable. . . . for everyone of those unfortunate men are pretended to be slaves, has a right to be declared free, for he never lost his liberty; he could not lose it; his Prince had no power to dispose of him.<sup>32</sup>

In *Serious Considerations on Several Important Subjects*, Benezet wrote that "nothing can more and positively militate against slavery of the Negro," than the concept of liberty espoused in the Declaration of Independence.

But the leading philosopher, who inspired the Declaration negatively, was John Locke (1632-1704). He was in fact strongly pro-slavery, believing that in most cases it arose as the natural condition of inferiors. Locke, who owned stock in the Royal Africa Company, justified slavery when he wrote a clause into the Carolina Constitution stating that "every freeman of Carolina shall have absolute power and authority over his Negro slaves." Other philosophers of the time, such as the Scotsman David Hume, wrote that "there never was a civilized nation of any complexion other than white, nor ever any individual eminent in action or speculation." On the other hand, conservative thinkers like Edmund Burke implicitly challenged the notion of absolute authority in relation to slavery. Benezet placed in his antislavery arguments Burke's written criticism of British colonial policy when he insisted that, "if we undertake to govern the inhabitants of such a country, we must govern them upon their own principles, and maxims and not upon ours."<sup>33</sup> Burke was voicing a notion that could be applied to any subject people. The philosophical debate over slavery found the French absolutist scholar Jean Bodin and the conservative English scholar Edmund Burke in basic agreement with Montesquieu and the more radical Scottish thinkers Hutcheson and Wallace. Benezet studied the works of each of these men and carefully used them to aid his cause.

Like many "religious enthusiasts" of his time Benezet took a philosophical and moral approach to life and tried to reconcile the dilemmas of God and man, reason and religion, natural law and divine law. In a letter to the Abbé Raynal he wrote that "men are noble, only in the exact proportion with their being rational."<sup>34</sup> Being a product of the Age of the Enlightenment, Benezet was subject to its contradictions and had to balance his devout religious beliefs with the developing natural rights philosophy, new scientific discoveries, and the evolutionary beliefs espoused during the American and French Revolutions. These ideas placed great social responsibilities on humankind. Whereas most Enlightenment thinkers saw government as a compact between men, Benezet believed that "Government is the ordinance of God, a compact and agreement of a number of people, mutually to support justice and order amongst themselves."<sup>35</sup> He also reasoned that "No legislature on earth can alter the nature of things, so as to make that to be right which is contrary to the law of God."<sup>36</sup> He reasoned that "Liberty is the right of every human creature, as soon as he breathes the vital air. And no human law can deprive him of the right which he derives from the law of nature."<sup>37</sup> Benezet thus believed that Blacks were "human creatures" and subject to the same laws of nature as whites.

Yet while Benezet considered religious and moral fidelity to be crucial attitudes toward others, he sought out the truth in more than the Bible. He did not depend completely on religion but instead coupled his Quaker beliefs with the study of the Scottish moral philosophers and materialist French thinkers. His library was full of the latest studies on scientific thought. He also read from the libraries of prominent Philadelphians like James Logan, Benjamin Rush, and Benjamin Franklin, all of whom were well versed in the latest scientific discoveries. He simply used every source he could to augment his appeal against slavery. He was rational and enthusiastic, enlightened and religious. He knew the language and discourse of the time, asking in 1766 "how many of those who distinguish themselves as the Advocates of Liberty, remain insensible and inattentive to the treatment of thousands and tens of thousands of our fellow man," the enslaved African.<sup>38</sup>

While angry at what man had done to his fellow man, Benezet fully realized that in the end rational people would have to take the lead in the crusade against slavery and the slave trade. It was to these rational men and women, of all beliefs and religions, that he made his appeal. In the eighteenth century, ideas espoused during the Age of Revolution were constantly passed across the oceans. Benezet's correspondence with Granville Sharp, his letters to French antislavery leaders, and his readings of the Scottish moral philosophers are prime examples of this exchange. However, more than anyone of his time, Benezet looked beyond religious and intellectual reasoning by observing the folkways, customs, traditions, and yearnings of the Africans and the emerging African-Americans to understand their plight.

In seeking to understand the conditions of Africans and of their lives before slavery, Benezet read every source available to him. These were the journals of slave traders and travelers' accounts. He became the first abolitionist to use constructively the narratives of adventures, factors, or agents for the Royal Africa Company, and surgeons and crewmen on slave ships in the antislavery cause. Benezet often cited the journal of William Bosman, the Dutch factor who wrote about the Gold, Ivory, and Slave Coasts of Africa. Robin Law, a historian of pre-colonial Africa, in describing the Slave Coast, writes that "in terms of modern political geography, it corresponds to the coastal portions of south-eastern Ghana, the Republics of Togo and Benin (formerly Dahomey), and the southwestern corner of Nigeria. This area became called the Slave Coast. . . . in reference to its role as suppliers of slaves for the Atlantic Slave Trade, and in contrast to the Gold Coast (modern Ghana) to the west, which initially (prior to the eighteenth century) exported principally gold rather than slaves."<sup>39</sup>

Benezet's first publication employing sources familiar with Africa was *Observation on the Enslaving, importing and purchasing of Negroes* (1760). His more substantive *Some Historical Accounts of Guinea* was first published in

1771. While it is impossible to know the actual circulation of these and his other pamphlets, they were reprinted often in the colonies and many were sent to England and France (See appendix I). A careful reading of both pamphlets, and a comparison with his use of the journals of Bosman and the Frenchman Jean Barbot, shows Benezet's careful and judicious use of his sources.

*Some Historical Account of Guinea*, Benezet's most ambitious tract, is divided into twenty-one chapters, each exploring different aspects of life in these areas of Old Benin [present-day Nigeria], where Equiano was born and enslaved, and Kongo. His stated purpose was to "give some account of the different parts of Africa, from which the Negro is brought."<sup>40</sup> Benezet tries to establish several premises which directly contradicted European notions of Africa. He insisted that "scarce a country in the whole world is better calculated for affording the necessary comforts of life to its inhabitants." The Africans "still retain a great deal of innocent simplicity: and when not stirred up to revenge from the frequent abuses they have received from the Europeans in general, manifest themselves to be a human, sociable people, whose facilities are as capable of improvement as those of other men." Lastly he asserts that the Africans' economy and government is in many ways commendable, and "it appears that they might have lived happy, if not disturbed by the Europeans."<sup>41</sup>

Benezet's geographic studies also took him to "the southernmost cape of Africa, called the Cape of Good Hope," which he describes as a country "settled by Caffres and Hottentots, who have never been concerned in the making or selling of slaves."<sup>42</sup> He describes the lives of Africans known as the Jalofs, Fulis, and Mandigos. His knowledge of the regions and of the different African political structures made *Some Historical Accounts of Guinea* one of the first books to be used in Northern secondary schools as a source book on the study of Africa.

In *Some Historical Account*, Benezet confronts the myth of the natural inferiority of Blacks and of the superiority of the Europeans who came to save the "feeble race." He describes an abundant Africa inhabited by people who only produced what they needed. Without saying so directly, he judges them favorably, using the Quaker doctrine against excess and avarice. Indeed, all his life he and Woolman tried to show that Quakers who were involved in the slave trade or who owned slaves were locked in a battle for greed and wealth at the expense of the human soul. Rare for his era, Benezet distinguished between Africans who collaborated with slave traders and those who were their victims. His understanding of the societies and political boundaries of eighteenth-century Africa was remarkably accurate for a writer of his times.

Benezet also uses the Frenchman Jean Barbot's narrative as a primary source in his research. Barbot's works consist of his journal plus all the letters he wrote to acquaintances during his travels throughout West Africa from 1678



through 1712. According to Barbot, the slaves sold by the Africans themselves "are for the most Part Prisoners of War taken either in fight or pursuit."<sup>43</sup> In *Some Historical Account of Guinea*, Benezet cites Barbot to argue "that the Guineans are very honest and just in their dealings; and they have such an aversion for theft, that by the law of the country it is punishable by death."<sup>44</sup> But in the very same letter of 1732 Barbot notes that they were not so scrupulous in dealing with slave traders. Barbot writes that "few or none of the Blacks are to be trusted, as being crafty and deceitful, and who will never let slip an opportunity of cheating an European."<sup>45</sup> To be sure, Benezet seldom quotes Barbot or others' negative descriptions of Africans. This was not from a utopian notion of Africans, but because he refused to write anything that would justify the actions of the pro-slavery advocates.

Benezet additionally uses excerpts from a representative of the French Royal Academy of Science, Michel Adanson, to appeal to French as well as to English opinion. He cited Adanson that "it is amazing that, such a rude and illiterate people, should reason so pertinently in regard to those heavenly bodies; there is no manner of doubt, but that with proper instruments, and a good will, they would become excellent astronomers." Thus Benezet used the French scholar's works to show that even if the Europeans thought the Africans "rude and illiterate," the Blacks could if given the proper opportunities become great scientists.

Andrew Brue's account was often used by Benezet to link his antislavery thoughts to his pacifism. In describing wars between neighboring Africans, Brue writes "that the Europeans are far from desiring to act as peacemakers, amongst the Negroes, which would be acting contrary to their interest, since the greater the Wars, the more Slaves are procured."<sup>46</sup> The divide and rule tactic was often used by slave traders and colonial powers who believed in the motto "the more wars the more slaves." Benezet was one of the first writers to use these accounts to link the Atlantic slave trade, war, and the profit motive to connect the actions of the British and French merchants with the spread of a commercial slave trade deep into the heart of Africa. In one passage from a former slave trader he shows how the whites came loaded with goods to purchase slaves from local people. The locals, having no slaves at hand, soon launched forays against neighboring tribes and incited war to justify the capturing of slaves. Upon victory and the capture of villagers the conquerors would "usually carry the Infants in Sacks, and gag the Men and Women for fear they should alarm the Villagers near the factories, which is in the King's Interest not to ruin."<sup>47</sup>

Benezet was familiar with the works of Leo Africanus or Leo the African. A Moroccan and an early historian of Africa, Leo Africanus wrote in the first half of the sixteenth century about the kingdoms of Africa. The words of Leo Africanus, although of an entirely different time and place, coincided with

Benezet's reading of George Wallace. According to Benezet, Africanus wrote that:

they [the Africans] lived in common, having no property in land, no tyrant nor superior lord, but supported themselves in an equal state, upon the natural produce of the country, which afforded plenty of roots, game and honey. That ambition and avarice never drove them into foreign countries to subdue or cheat their neighbors.<sup>48</sup>

Benezet also entered the debate over the number of Blacks forcibly taken from Africa, the numbers perishing during the "middle passage," and the number reaching the New World. He described one of his sources as "a book printed in Liverpool, call the *Liverpool Memorandum-book*."<sup>49</sup> Benezet started by extracting from the book "an exact list of the number of vessels employed in the Guinea trade and the number of Slaves imported in each vessel" brought into Liverpool "which amounted to upwards of thirty thousand, and from the number of vessels employed by the African Company in London and Bristol."<sup>50</sup> He then reasoned that "we may with some degree of certainty conclude, there is, at least, One Hundred Thousand Negroes purchased and brought on board our ships yearly from the coast of Africa on their account."<sup>51</sup>

In a publication titled *Two Dialogues in the Man Trade*, a Mr. Philmore gives even higher yearly figures of the kidnapping of Africans for an earlier period. In the pamphlet Philmore debates with a gentleman called Mr. Allcraft. Philmore cites William Snelgrave (another key source for Benezet) who wrote that it was "proved before the commissioners of trade" that in 1725 "200 slave trade ships went to the coast of Guinea." Philmore estimated that 50,000 slaves were traded yearly and "a tenth of them die upon the voyage." Even Equiano used the figures compiled by these men, Snelgrave, others, and ships' records to plead his case. In his *Narrative*, Equiano wrote that in Barbados "1,000 Negroes are required annually to keep up with the original stock, which is only 80,000."<sup>52</sup> Benezet also knew, as did Equiano, that millions of enslaved Africans did not reach western shores due to disease, maltreatment, and resistance. They often committed suicide by jumping overboard.

Benezet's English antislavery associate, Thomas Clarkson, used the method of his Quaker friend in Philadelphia in appealing to whites about the slave trade. While a student at Cambridge University, Clarkson was required to write an essay: "*Anne liceat invitos in servitutem dare?* It is lawful to make slaves of others against their will?" Clarkson wrote of having great difficulty finding materials for his thesis when by accident he stumbled upon "an advertisement of Anthony Benezet's *Historical Account of Guinea*."<sup>53</sup> Clarkson went on to write, "in this precious book I found almost all I wanted. I obtained by means of it a knowledge of, and gained great access to, the great authorities of Adanson,

Moore, Barbot, Smith, Bosman, and others."<sup>54</sup> However, Clarkson went one step farther in *An Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade in Two Parts* (1778).<sup>55</sup> He estimated that between September 1784 and January 1790, 5,000 white seamen were employed in the slave trade and 1,950, or 40 percent, were lost at sea. Putting the debate in terms of the loss of white lives (as Adam Smith did when relating the loss of income for many poor whites in the colonies) was a powerful argument in the hands of the abolitionists. By joining forces with Benezet, Clarkson's voice played a vital role in bringing about the end of the English slave trade in the early nineteenth century, years after he first embarked on his antislavery mission.

The economic and naval rivalry among Spain, France, England, and Holland was also well known to Benezet. The slave traders of England argued that if they did not trade in slaves, other nations certainly would, and they would lose the competitive edge. Benezet was well aware of the views of men from other countries. He cited the Spanish cleric, Bartolomé de Las Casas, author of *The Devastation of the Indies*. Las Casas considered the "weak temperament" of the natives for hard work in the New World and argued that Blacks were more suited for hard labor in the torrid temperatures. In *Some Historical Account*, Benezet sought to refute the cleric's notion that Black skin and hands were more adapted to hard labor than the white or Native Americans, and gave the experience of a white indentured servant in Barbados as an example. In *A Short Account of that Part of Africa*, Benezet castigates the slave dealers for kidnapping Africans and employing them in "hard labor, in Climates, unsuited to their Nature."<sup>56</sup> Benezet never fell prey to the notions of many of his contemporaries concerning the Africans' easy adaptation to New World bondage.

Benezet was careful in his works to omit any mention of physical resistance to slavery. He used only those sections of travel narratives and journals which aided his cause of peaceful abolition. For instance, he omitted sections of Hutcheson's *Systems of Moral Philosophy*, which stated that "in all governments even the most absolute . . . the subjects must have a right of resistance, as the trust is broken, beside the manifest pleas of necessity."<sup>57</sup> While Benezet believed that abolishing slavery would be in the best interest for the "prosperity and safety of the whole body," he could not agree with Hutcheson on the way to achieve that goal.

Benezet feared Black uprisings. In a letter to Joseph Phipps dated May 28, 1763 he wrote what he never would have put in a pamphlet:

with respect to the Danger of the Southern Colonies are exposed to from the vast disproportion there is between the number of Negroes, and the whites, but it was too tender a point to expose to ye view of such of the blacks, as can read. In the treatise, the Proportion in South Carolina is said to be fifteen

Blacks to a white, but by their own account, the difference is rather twenty to one. In Georgia and South Carolina the Negroes are not hemmed in by the some hundreds of miles, as they are in the Islands, but have a back Country uninhibited for some hundreds of miles, where the Negroes might not only retire, but who expect to be supported & assisted by the Indians.<sup>58</sup>

This insight caused Benezet to think that in certain places such as South Carolina, where Blacks outnumbered whites, the potential for violent upheaval was quite possible. While the black to white ratio was not "fifteen Blacks to a white" as Benezet quoted some whites to believe, there was a large enough majority to strike fear in the slave holders. No doubt Benezet knew of the 1739 Stono Rebellion which had put fear in the hearts and minds of the slave owners who further clamped down on the Blacks in the aftermath of the defeat of the uprising.<sup>59</sup> Second, Benezet realized the potential of Black and Native American unity to oppose white rule. Third, he observed the propensity of the Africans, in the words of the Negro spiritual, to "Steal Away." In his letter to Phipps, he refers to the Maroons, runaway Africans who had established their own communities. In South Carolina this occurred near the Sea Islands of the Atlantic Coast. Maronnage was much more common in the mountainous areas of the West Indies, Latin America, and especially in Brazil. Further on, Benezet wrote of a correspondence from a "pious man" who had just returned "from a religious visit to Barbie, a Dutch Settlement near Surinam." Benezet told of hearing that "at least eighty thousand have at different times fled from those Settlements and have taken refuge, at first about 30 miles & now about an hundred Miles back of the settlement."<sup>60</sup> The letter ends with Benezet concluding that the Dutch will have to agree to a peace with the Maroons.<sup>61</sup>

In this letter to Phipps, Benezet also alludes to the necessity to prepare for the "freedom of those amongst us, after a reasonable period of time."<sup>62</sup> He later calls for some reparations to the freed Blacks in the form of communally shared land. Benezet's land sharing plan amazingly resembled some African forms of communalism or primitive communism which existed before European conquest and which Benezet knew from his many readings. Possibly Benezet knew of some of the sophisticated land tenure systems that existed in pre-colonial Africa. His ideas of allotting lands to the Blacks preceded the Reconstruction dream of "forty acres and a mule" by almost a century. The Reconstruction program, however, did not include a communal land tenure plan.

Other forms of resistance to slavery besides maronnage (in groups, which was mostly an African tradition), included running away alone (by acclimated Africans who knew the terrain), open revolt, sabotage of masters' property, suicide, and work slow downs. In his various works Benezet chronicled each of these forms of resistance.



Benezet paid special attention to the English colonies of Jamaica and Barbados comparing them to slave outposts held by other European nations. Of conditions in Barbados, he quoted the rector of St. Lucy, who believed that if there were any failings of Blacks in the arts or in the "common affairs" of life, it was due to "their want of education" and the "depression of their spirits by slavery" rather than "to any want of natural ability."<sup>63</sup> The situation of the Blacks in the West Indies was confirmed by the unnamed author of *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, who wrote that "the Negroes in our colonies endure a slavery more complete, and attended with far worse circumstances, than what any people in their condition suffer in any other place in the world, or have suffered in any other period of time: proofs of this are not wanting."<sup>64</sup>

In *A Short Account*, Benezet documents the treatment of the slaves in Barbados. Using the account of Sir Hans Sloane, the well-known author of the *History of Jamaica*, Benezet presents his case on the atrocities against the Blacks. Just as he notes the Black majority in South Carolina, Benezet quotes Sloane on Jamaica to show that "because they are three times the number of the Whites in this Island, and have made frequent attempts to get the mastery" they must never be trusted or left idle. Benezet believed that once the enslaved Africans realized their own strength they would try to "get their Liberty, or to deliver themselves out of the miserable slavery they are in."<sup>65</sup> While never calling for majority rule, he does pose the question to the whites of Barbados: "Where is the Sense of assigning this Majority, which is of our procuring, as a Reason for their treating the Blacks with such severity?"<sup>66</sup>

Time after time, Benezet wrote of planned slave revolts, especially one which took place in Antigua in 1737. Again using excerpts from Sir Hans Sloane, he describes the catching of the "King, that is, he who was to have been King of the Blacks, had the plot succeeded and his two generals."<sup>67</sup> This planned revolt became well-known throughout the British Empire. The authorities meted out extreme punishment to discourage future revolts. King and General were titles given to the plot's leaders, who gave orders to kill all the whites. The Antiguan Blacks living closely together on a small island had retained their "Africanisms" longer than many of the slaves in the colonies and used their links with their African past to plot for their freedom.<sup>68</sup>

Some four years after the events in Antigua, the "rumor of revolt" swept New York City. Historians are divided over whether the events that so engrossed the city constituted a real slave revolt, white hysteria, or a criminal conspiracy. In 1741 groups of enslaved and free Blacks, indentured servants, Irish and West Indian sailors, along with several Dutchmen "conspired" to revolt against the New York authorities. In the end thirteen Blacks were burned at the stake, and sixteen others were hanged. Four whites were hanged and their bodies, along with the Blacks, were left to rot in public. Seventy other

Blacks were sent out of the colony, and after 1741 only 30 percent of the slaves arrived in New York from the West Indies with the other 70 percent coming directly from Africa because of the slave owners' fear of rebellious slaves from Antigua and Jamaica. Prior to the 1741 "rumor of revolt" 70 percent of the slaves had arrived from the West Indies and the other 30 percent from Africa. The New York conspirators had also planned to name a General and a King to lead the planned revolt and to govern the island. In the New York conspiracy the General was a Black named Caesar, and the King a white Dutchman named Hughson.<sup>69</sup> Because Benezet had written of his fear of slave revolts in the colonies, and knew that Blacks also read or heard about his pamphlets, he never publicly wrote about the New York and South Carolina "uprisings." But he did write personal letters to friends about the distant Antigua episode and the 1760 Tacky's Revolt in Jamaica, led by a Coramantee slave from the west coast of Africa. In all likelihood he wrote about these events to alert the North American slaveocracy of the danger that they also confronted.

Like Thomas Paine in *Common Sense* and John Woolman in *A Plea for the Poor*, Benezet took his case to the white colonial inhabitants. Nowhere is this more evident than in his shorter works, *Observations on the Enslaving, importing and purchasing of Negroes* (1760), *Short Observations on Slavery* (1781), and *Notes on the Slave Trade* (1783). In *Short Observations* subtitled "Introductory remarks to the writings of the Abbé Raynal," he poses a question to the Southern whites and indirectly to those of the North. Benezet asked, "Do not the laws in some of the islands, and frequently the Southern States, in effect encourage the murder of a Negro, who has absented himself for a certain time from his master's service, by giving a reward greater for the poor fugitive's head than for bringing him home alive?"<sup>70</sup> Benezet was emphasizing the fact that in many states, compensation would be given to the master if an escaped slave was killed by slave hunters. After all, why bring back a rebellious slave when another strong and sturdy one could be bought?

In *Observations*, Benezet rebukes those slave owners who had tried to justify their deeds using the Bible, or who sought to place all blame for slavery on the traders. He urges them to observe the divine rule, "to do unto all Men, as would they should do unto us" . . . for "without Purchasers, there would be no Trade; and consequently every Purchaser as he encourages the trade, becomes partaker in the Guilt of it."<sup>71</sup> Benezet also addresses those "well minded persons, into whose Hands some of the Negroes have fallen, either by Inheritance, Executioner ship, or even some by Charitable Motives," and told them that they were as guilty of sin as if they had brought the slaves themselves. In one of his most magnificent insights, he wrote that slavery "might show from innumerable Examples, how it introduces Idleness, discourages Marriage, corrupts the Youth and ruins and debauches Morals" of whites.<sup>72</sup> Benezet believes that slavery and racism destroys the soul of the white as surely as it does the

bodies of the Black. In *Notes On the Slave Trade*, Benezet argues that slavery and the slave trade were "inconsistent with every right of mankind, with every feeling of humanity, and every precept of Christianity: not to point out its inconsistency with the welfare, peace and prosperity of every country, in proportion as it prevails."<sup>73</sup> After describing the sufferings the trade brought to the Blacks, he addresses the "captains employed in the trade." He tells them of the beauty of Guinea (West Africa) and of the kindness of the people who have been separated from their loved ones. The slavetraders separate "brethren and sisters from each other" and herded "them into ships like swine" and they were "stewed together, as close as they ever could lie, without any regard to decency. Such slavery as is not found among the Turks at Algiers, nor among the heathens in America."<sup>74</sup>

Benezet begs the slave trading captain to "immediately quit the horrid trade. At all events be an honest man." He then turns his attention to the merchant, telling him that "it is your money, that is the spring of all, that empowers him to go on."<sup>75</sup> He tells of the need to challenge the morality of the slave owners and urged them to promise that "I will never buy a slave more while I live." Moving in on the conscience of the merchant, Benezet pleads "Oh let his resolution be yours! Have no more any part in this detestable business."<sup>76</sup>

Benezet also appeals to the plantation owner who claims to "pays honestly for my goods, and am not concerned to know how they are come by." The goods were of course his chattel slaves, viewed by the plantation owner as property. Benezet accuses the planters of not being as honest as "pickpockets, . . . housebreakers," and those who committed "robbery upon the highway." He indicts them for fraud, robbery and murder, and told them that it is their "money that pays the merchant, and through him the captain and the African butchers" concluding that they are "the spring that puts all the rest in motion."<sup>77</sup> No one who had any part in slavery was innocent. Not the "man-stealer," the ship captain, the merchant, the plantation owner nor even the person who proclaimed innocence through inheriting a "homeless" slave.

In his *Short Account of Africa*, Benezet confronts those who claim "that if the English were to drop this Trade entirely it would immediately thereupon be carried on by other Nation, to a much greater degree than it is now."<sup>78</sup> He turns upside down the arguments of those who asserted that an end to slavery "would lessen if not ruin, some other considerable branches of our commerce, especially the Sugar and Tobacco Trades, because of the Difficulty in getting Hands enough, in the room of the Blacks, to work and labor in those plantations."<sup>79</sup> Characteristically, Benezet answers all the questions in high moral tones and armed with facts about the ability of white labor to perform. He ends by alerting whites of the "impending catastrophe" if the trade continues. As in several of his works, he ended by citing lengthy passages from Philmore's *Two Dialogues on the Slave Trade*.

\* \* \* \* \*

There were many facets to Anthony Benezet. As a Quaker educator he developed new ways to teach students to read. He wrote *An Essay on Grammar* (1778) and *The Pennsylvania Spelling Book* (1778). He taught Quaker youth methods to solve complex mathematical problems. He used mathematical knowledge to gather statistics against the slave trade. To refute arguments about the innate inequality of Blacks, he read everything possible about African civilization. His writings were used in some of the first North American courses which discussed the positive contributions of Africa and her peoples. His command of languages allowed him to study travelers' journals in French, English, German, and Dutch and to visualize the African continent before European domination. He became a self-taught anthropologist, learning about the many different peoples and customs of West Africa. Benezet also studied the economic and social systems of different West African societies. He lived as a humanist, visualizing and trying to feel the suffering of the enslaved Blacks and sensing the pain of slavery within his soul as surely as the Blacks did upon their flesh.

Anthony Benezet's "Last Will and Testament" began with the words, "Be it remembered that I, Anthony Benezet, a teacher of the Free School for the Black People of Philadelphia." Before his death on May 3, 1784 he helped found the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, which later grew into the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery. He made arrangements that after his wife was provided for the remainder of his savings be left to the African School and the newly formed Abolitionist Committee. He may not have been as zealous or radical in his views as the nineteenth-century abolitionist martyrs John Brown or Nat Turner, or as well-known as Frederick Douglass or William Lloyd Garrison, but his influence among his contemporaries who raised their voices against slavery was unmatched.

Great social reformers, both men and women, use every possible means to achieve equality and justice. Benezet was no different. But what set him apart from others of his era was his great imagination in developing new methods of disseminate anti-slavery ideas and to organize anti-slavery political activities. At the very root of his thinking was the belief that Black men, women, and children were indeed human beings and equal to all others.

When Benezet died, Jacques-Pierre Brissot, the French traveler to the United States and future revolutionary leader wrote, "What author, what great man, will ever be followed to his grave by four hundred Negroes, snatched by his own assiduity, his own generosity, from ignorance, wretchedness, and slavery? Who then has a right to speak haughtily of this benefactor of men?"<sup>80</sup> Brissot also wrote "where is the man in all Europe, of whatever rank or birth,



who is equal to Benezet? Who is not obliged to respect him? How long will authors suffer themselves to be shackled by the prejudices of society? Will they never perceive that nature has created all men equal, that wisdom and virtue are the only criteria of superiority? Who was more virtuous than Benezet? Who was more useful to society, to mankind."<sup>81</sup>

In his later years Benezet corresponded with French anti-slavery advocates like Brissot, the Abbé Raynal, Marquis de Lafayette, and others who eventually played leading roles in the French Revolution, and who joined in the call to free slaves in French territories in the West Indies. His correspondence played a role in the 1788 founding of "Les Amis des Noirs," which became France's leading antislavery society.

About Benezet's funeral, Robert Vaux, his first biographer, wrote, "Never had the city on such an occasion seen a demonstration in which persons of all classes participated. There were the officials of the city, men of all trades and professions, various sects and denominations, and hundreds of Negroes testifying by their attendance, and by their tears, the grateful sense they entertained of his pious efforts on their behalf."<sup>82</sup> *The Pennsylvania Gazette* as well as *Watson's Annual Journal* noted Benezet's death. It paid tribute to his legacy and to the fact that hundreds of Blacks followed his coffin in the streets. Although Benezet said upon his deathbed, "I am dying and feel ashamed to meet the face of my maker, I have done so little in his cause,"<sup>83</sup> the Blacks who followed and wept at his funeral procession surely felt otherwise.

Long after Benezet's death antislavery advocates continued to invoke his name. Antislavery newspapers and periodicals of the early nineteenth century time and again resurrected his legacy. *The Philanthropist* of Mt. Pleasant, Ohio reprinted on June 4, 1818 the letter sent to Benezet by Patrick Henry on January 18, 1773 thanking him for a copy of his *Historical Account of Guinea*.<sup>84</sup> *The Philanthropist* also reprinted, in its September 1817, edition Benezet's letter of August 25, 1783 addressed to Charlotte, Queen of Britain, pleading with her to help end the slave trade. *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*, edited by abolitionist Benjamin Lundy, reprinted Benezet's letter to the Abbé Raynal of July 16, 1781 in its January 1831 edition, just as the debate over slavery waxed in the United States Congress.<sup>85</sup> The newspaper of the Eastern Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, *The Pennsylvania Freeman* on January 10, 1839, and the *National Enquirer* a year before, on January 11, 1838 printed articles condemning colonization of the oppressed African. Both articles were signed BENEZET, the name taken by the unidentified author in Anthony Benezet's memory over fifty years after his death.<sup>86</sup>

African-American leaders also continued to pay homage to the gentle Quaker. On April 14, 1836 James Forten Jr., the eldest son of the famed Black abolitionist and former Benezet student, spoke before the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. He told the gathering: "You are called fanatics.

Well what if you are? Ought you to shrink from this name? God forbid. There is an eloquence in such fanaticism, for it whispers hope to the slave; there is sanctity in it, for it contains the consecrated spirit of religion; it is the fanaticism of a Benezet, a Rush, a Franklin, a Jay."<sup>87</sup> The fact that the descendant of a slave invoked the name Benezet as first among equals in the antislavery crusade showed the depth of Black admiration for a man who dedicated his life to this cause. In the British parliamentary debates of the early nineteenth century no less a figure than William Wilberforce, the prominent English statesman, quoted the words of Benezet.

The delegates to the Pennsylvania Black State Convention of 1848 issued an "Appeal to the Voters of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania." After presenting their case to the enfranchised whites, the Black delegates noted that "when the last scroll of the time shall be wound up on the great windlass of eternity it will present the indestructible names of your Penns, Franklins, Rushes, Wistars, Benezets, Woolmans, Morrisises, Wilsons, Taylors, and a host of others whose highest aim was justice to mankind."<sup>88</sup>

In 1899, W.E.B. DuBois wrote in *The Philadelphia Negro*, generally considered the nation's first urban sociological study and the first sociological study of a Black community, that "Anthony Benezet and the Friends of Philadelphia have the honor of first recognizing the fact that the welfare of the State demands the education of the Negro children."<sup>89</sup> DuBois went on to note that "on motion of one, probably Benezet, it was decided that instruction ought to be provided for Negro children."<sup>90</sup> With this decision the "School for Black People," later known as the "African Free School," was established. In the second issue of the *Journal of Negro History* in 1917, Carter G. Woodson, the originator of Negro History Month, wrote of the nation's debt to Benezet. He wrote that Benezet "obtained many of his facts about the suffering of slaves from the Negroes themselves, moving among them in their homes, at the places where they worked, or on the wharves where they stopped when traveling. To defuse this knowledge where it would be most productive of the desired results, he talked with tourists and corresponded with every influential person whom he could reach."<sup>91</sup> In later issues of the *Journal*, Woodson published many of the early Quaker appeals against slavery.

Summing up Benezet's high reputation in Philadelphia and throughout the colonies, Benjamin Rush, one of the founders of American medical science and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, wrote in a laudatory letter to England's Granville Sharpe "Anthony Benezet stood alone a few years ago in opposing Negro slavery in Philadelphia; and now three-fourths of the province, as well as of the city cry out against it."<sup>92</sup>

In death, as in life, Benezet, served as a symbol to those who fought against slavery. He led by quiet example and devout work. Some tried to isolate him, others scorned him. He lived modestly and plainly, preferring to use his mea-

ger salary as a teacher to help defray the cost of his writings and to run the Quaker schools. He need not have repented on his deathbed that he had not done enough to end slavery. The enslaved African men, women, and children who he fought to free viewed him as a saint among sinners, a healer amidst pain, and a godsend amongst infidels. That is why when he died the largest gathering of Blacks in Philadelphia up to that time, and a companion number of whites, followed his casket along the streets of the city to the burial ground of the Society of Friends.

# Notes

1. George S. Brookes, *Friend Anthony Benezet* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 5.
2. *Ibid.*, 20.
3. *Ibid.*, 23.
4. "Anthony Benezet" in *Quaker Biographies: A Series of Sketches*, vol. III, 1909, 88.
5. Robert Vaux, *Life of Anthony Benezet* (Philadelphia: Sherman & Co. Printers, 1867), 8.
6. *Ibid.*, 8.
7. Anthony Benezet, *A Short Account of the People Called Quakers* (Philadelphia, 1780), 2-3.
8. Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), 17.
9. *Ibid.*, 18.
10. Anthony Benezet, *A Caution and Warning To Great Britain and Her Colonies* (Philadelphia: Henry Miller, 1766), 16.
11. Anthony Benezet, *A Short Account of That Part of Africa, Inhabited by the Negroes* (Philadelphia: W. Dunlap, 1762), 64.
12. *Ibid.*, 64.
13. Letter from Anthony Benezet to Samuel Forthergill, November 27, 1758, Haverford College, Quaker Collection.
14. Robert Vaux, *Memoirs of the Lives of Benjamin Lay and Ralph Sandiford: Two of the Earliest Advocates of the Emancipation of the Enslaved Africans* (Philadelphia: W. Alexander 1815), 17, 25-28; Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 16-17. Roger Bruns, *AM I NOT A FRIEND AND A BROTHER: The Antislavery Crusade of Revolutionary America 1688-1788*, ed. by Roger Bruns (New York: Chelsea House, 1977), 46-64.
15. Bruns, 46.
16. *Ibid.*, 46.
17. Roberts Vaux, *Memoirs of Anthony Benezet* (Philadelphia: W. Alexander, 1817), 108-109.
18. J. P. Gledstone, *The Life and Travels of Whitefield* (London, 1871), 135.
19. Quoted in Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, 158.
20. Letter From Patrick Henry to Robert Pleasants, January 18, 1773, Haverford College, Quaker Collection.
21. *Brief Sketch of the Schools for Black People* (Philadelphia: Friends' Book Store, 1867).
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68. The story of this plot is told in great detail by David Barry Gaspar in *Bondsmen and Rebels: A Story of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua, with Implications for Colonial British America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985). For an overview of the resistance in the Caribbean, see Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).
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84. *The Philanthropist*, Mt. Pleasant, OH, June 4, 1818.

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86. *Ibid.*, 159.
87. Benjamin Rush, medical doctor and signer of the Declaration of Independence; John Jay, United States president of the Continental Congress and the future first Chief Justice and Benjamin Franklin, publicist, philosopher, diplomat, and inventor, all were correspondents with Benezet in his antislavery mission.
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90. *Ibid.*, 83.
91. Carter G. Woodson, "Anthony Benezet" *Journal of Negro History*, 2, (1917), 37-50.
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## APPENDIX I

### Key Antislavery Writings of Anthony Benezet

*The Case of Our Fellow Creatures the Oppressed Africans* (London: 1783, 1784, and Philadelphia: 1784).

*A Caution and a Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies in a Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions. Collected from Various Authors and Submitted to the Serious Considerations of All, More Especially Those in Power* (Philadelphia: 1766, 1767, 1784, 1785, 1858, 1969, London: 1767, 1768, 1785, 1788).

*Notes on The Slave Trade*, etc. (Philadelphia: 1783).

*Observations on the Enslaving, Importing and Purchasing of Negroes, with some Advice thereon, Extracted from the Epistle of the Yearly meeting of the People Called Quakers, Held at London in the Year 1758* (Germantown, Pa. 1759, 1760).

*Observations on Slavery, treatise bound with Serious Considerations on Several Important Subjects viz., On War and Its Inconsistency with the Gospel and the Bad Effects of Spirituous Liquors* (2nd ed., Philadelphia: 1778).

*Serious Considerations on Several Important Subjects, viz, on War and Its Inconsistency with the Gospel; Observations on Slavery, and Remarks on the Nature and Bad Effects of Spirituous Liquors* (Philadelphia 1778).

*A Short Account of That Part of Africa Inhabited by the Negroes, and the manner by which the Slave-Trade is Carried* (Philadelphia: 1762, 1763, and 1768, London: 1768, Dublin: 1768, Paris: 1767, 1788).

*Short Observations on Slavery, Introductory to Some Extracts from the Writing of the Abbe Raynal on that Important Subject* (Philadelphia: 1781, 1782).

*Some Historical Observations of Guinea, its Situation, Produce, and General Disposition of its Inhabitants. With an Inquiry into the Rise and Progress of the Slave Trade, Its Nature and Lamentable Effects* (Philadelphia: 1771, 1784, 1788, 1815, 1968).

Also see John Wesley, *Views of American Slavery, Taken a Century Ago* (Philadelphia: 1858, New York: 1969), which contains excerpts from Benezet's *Caution and a Warning* and Wesley's, *Thoughts on Slavery*.

## APPENDIX II

### Selected Bibliography on Anthony Benezet

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Woodson, Carter G., "Anthony Benezet," *Journal of Negro History*, 2, (1917), 37-50.